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SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On 4 December 1990, the General Assembly adopted resolution 45/60, entitled "Scientific and technological developments and their impact on international security", paragraphs 1 to 3 of which read as follows:

> "The General Assembly,
>
> "...
>
> "1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Scientific and technological developments and their impact on international security"; 1/
>
> "2. Fully agrees that:
>
> "(a) The international community needs to position itself better to follow the nature and direction of technological change;
>
> "(b) The United Nations can serve as a catalyst and a clearing-house for ideas for this purpose;

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* A/47/150.

"3. Requests the Secretary-General to continue to follow scientific and technological developments in order to make an assessment of emerging 'new technologies' and to submit to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session a framework for technology assessment guided, inter alia, by criteria suggested in his report".

2. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request contained in paragraph 3 of the resolution.

II. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

3. The report of the Secretary-General on scientific and technological developments and their impact on international security (A/45/568) referred to an illustrative framework for assessment of "new technologies" that could include such criteria as:

(a) Will they offer new military options either by significantly improving known weapons or by creating new weapons systems?

(b) What will be their impact on crisis management in peace and during conflict?

(c) Will they promote better means of verification or weapons disposal?

(d) Will they create a new set of issues for ongoing negotiations?

4. In this connection, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs has undertaken to monitor the relevant literature in the area of scientific and technological developments and to establish contacts and cooperation with institutions and experts qualified to assess developments in specific areas of knowledge covering the five broad fields of technological development identified in the 1990 report of the Secretary-General, namely, nuclear technology, space technology, materials technology, information technology and biotechnology.

5. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has also been consulting with interested Governments with a view to organizing seminars/workshops that would address various aspects of scientific and technological developments and their impact on international security, including the question of so-called dual-use technologies.

6. In addition, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has undertaken initial consultations with individual experts and research institutions with a view to establishing an informal network of experts with different backgrounds, such as scientists, scientific advisers, arms control negotiators and political analysts, that would assist the Secretary-General in elaborating a framework for technology assessment on the basis of the criteria suggested in the report of the Secretary-General.

7. Through the establishment of this informal network of experts on science and technology for international security and disarmament, the Office for Disarmament Affairs would also seek to promote transparency in technological advancement as a measure of confidence-building; to follow scientific and technological developments and to promote, as appropriate, international cooperation in the application of such developments for disarmament-related purposes (verification, weapons disposal, handling of toxic materials); and to broaden the dialogue on issues of technology transfer within the objectives of international peace and security with a view to ensuring that sensitive technologies are only transferred for peaceful purposes.

8. As regards further measures aimed at fully implementing the request contained in paragraph 3 of resolution 45/60, the Secretary-General wishes to recall the inclusion in the 1991 working agenda of the Disarmament Commission, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 45/62 B of 4 December 1990, of the item entitled "The role of science and technology in the context of international security, disarmament and other related fields". In accordance with its agreed procedures, 2/ the Disarmament Commission has up to three consecutive years to address the item. Complex and detailed discussions took place on the matter in the Disarmament Commission in both 1991 and 1992, and one more year remains for the Commission to conclude its deliberations on the subject.

9. In the light of the above, the Secretary-General is of the view that it would be premature for any further action to be taken at this stage in order to develop a framework for technology assessment as requested in resolution 45/60. Rather, the Secretary-General finds it more appropriate to await the results of the discussions in the Disarmament Commission in 1993. The Secretary-General would then take the outcome of those deliberations fully into account in the development of a framework that would provide the international community with an indeed useful instrument for the assessment of scientific and technological developments.

Notes

1/ A/45/568.

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 42 (A/45/42), chap. II, para. 7.